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SUBJECT: MIXED MESSAGES: RESPONDING TO HOMOSEXUALITY IN
TURKEY

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¶1. (U) Summary. Turkey is confronting conflicting cultural and moral ideals as it continues down the road of modernity. On May 14, daily "Milliyet" reported that a moderate columnist from "Zaman" linked homosexuality with massacres in Iraq and Afghanistan in a televised statement during which he criticized restrictions on hate speech based on sexual orientation. Another piece in "Hurriyet" covered the professional restrictions faced by a soccer referee who openly announced his homosexuality. Both examples of state and social prejudice follow the unprecedentedly liberal decision by an Ankara high court, finding an Istanbul gay and bisexual support group not in violation of public morality. End Summary.

¶2. (U) "Zaman" columnist Ali Bulac linked massacres in Iraq and Afghanistan with homosexuality during a live interview on CNN Turk on May 13. Citing suicide bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bulac said "as homosexuality grows, massive killings of people also grow. There is a proportional relationship between homosexuality and civilian massacres during wars." Reported in "Milliyet" as having a "respectable" reputation among liberals in Turkey, Bulac also criticized the 2004 amendment to the Turkish criminal code which restricts hate speech based on sexual orientation. "If people have a right to decide their sexual preference, there should be a right to criticize this as well," he argued.

¶3. (U) Responding to Bulac's statements, the Association for Gay and Lesbian Cultural Studies and Solidarity (KAOS-GL) criticized this "dangerous approach" that focused not on the fact that civilians were killed but on the sexuality of the killer. Professors of psychology at several Istanbul universities noted that there is no literature that shows a correlation between "sexual preferences and tendency for massacres" and condemned additional prejudices against homosexuals.

¶4. (U) Prejudice permeates even the ranks of professional soccer in Turkey. On May 14, "Hurriyet" covered the story of a soccer referee who was not assigned to games by the Referees Committee because he publically announced his homosexuality. Officials from the Committee denied the allegation, and argued that the referee was not assigned because he had failed to complete his military service, a requirement mandated by the Committee by-laws. The "Hurriyet" story pointed out the flaw in the Committee's reasoning: the referee was exempted from military service under a legal provision that allows homosexuals to be exempted so long as they have a medical report documenting their homosexuality. The referee has promised to challenge the decision in court.

¶5. (U) These examples of rights abuses contrast starkly with a liberal decision by an Ankara high court on November 25, 2008 ruling against the closure of Lambda Istanbul - a gay and bisexual rights organization. The case, which had begun in a local Istanbul court in May 2006, ended with the court's decision stating, "sexual identity and orientation is not something individuals choose but it is brought from birth or acquired from the way of upbringing, hence it is something individuals do not control."

¶6. (SBU) Comment. In an atypical judicial outcome, the Ankara court delivered a verdict on the appeals case that seems counter to general societal norms. In addition to mentioning the constitutional guarantee for equality before the law "regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or sex," the court's verdict referenced the European Convention on Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international agreements. Such confrontations between ideals will only grow in number as Turkey grapples with the implications of modernity and openness in what is still a conservative culture. End Comment.
Wiener